

Transforming U.S. Forces Korea

by CSM William J. Gainey, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Armor Center

Hello from the home of Armor, good ole Fort Knox, Kentucky. As the United States Armor Center Command Sergeant Major, I would like each and every one of you to know that I am very proud of our Armor Force. We continue being the best in the world and it's all because of YOU!

I would like to share an adventure that my team, SGM Rollie Russell from Fort Knox and SFC Michael Clemens from PERSCOM, and I had from 31 July to 5 August 2002. This adventure took us to a far and distant country. A place that many of us have heard nothing but horrible stories about, a place that many soldiers have misconceptions about.

In this country, training is not a pastime; it is a way of life. The soldiers and leaders that I met during this trip spoke continuously about how it is to live with the constant fact that they could be fighting on a moment's notice. They have a saying, which goes something like this, "We take our mission seriously, because we could be fighting tonight."

I guess you are wondering where it is that a soldier soldiers 24/7, honing his or her combat skills to a razor's edge. My fellow soldiers, this place is Korea. Like many of you, I thought Korea should be put in the same category as a four-letter word (even though it has five). I now have a totally different per-

ception of Korea, not because I spent three days there, but because the soldiers that I spoke with shared how they feel about this training paradise.

South Korea has experienced a positive and dynamic social, political, and economic growth over the past few decades. This country serves as a model for struggling democracies around the world to emulate.

United States Forces Korea is no exception and continues to build on its quality of life goals. In the past few years, restoration and modernization funds have allowed the command to address maintenance and structure needs. Soldiers at Camp Garry Owen have new barracks, with more on the way. Other installations have seen new community activity and physical fitness centers, along with maintenance and training facilities.

There is an ongoing phased renovation program to improve the quality of family housing. Families occupying these quarters are elated over the improvements already made and enthusiasm continues to spread through the military communities. The first project will be completed by fiscal year 2003, with additional family housing projects under design and construction.

The past 50 years have taken a toll on U.S. military facilities in Korea, but much has already been done to improve quality of life. The United States Forces Korea is diligently working on transforming its force into a capabilities-based force, where training and quality of life is first rate.

As we drove from Yongsan to Camp Red Cloud, I was amazed at how the local people drive, and at the many fortified bunkers, and even fighting positions along the route. I had a great visit with the 2d Infantry Division command sergeant major, CSM Wheeler, who gave us a complete mission lay down that his soldiers face daily. This briefing was not conducted in a conference room, but in a bunker, which really stressed the seriousness of the situation.



CSM Wheeler spoke about his soldiers like family, and there was pride in his face with every word. CSM Wheeler, thank you for inviting us to Korea!

We departed for Camp Garry Owen where I was greeted by the 4/7 Cavalry commander, LTC William Hill, and Command Sergeant Major Ralph Middlebrooks. I was asked to tell you old soldiers that Camp Garry Owen does not look the same as it did when you were there years ago. Modern facilities have replaced most of the post-war Quonset huts. This is a great command and the soldiers are full of motivation and pride. One PFC told me that he thinks Korea has received a bad rap and he is glad that he didn't believe half the stories that other soldiers had told him about it, because they are not true. We enjoyed lunch with this fine cavalry squadron, and its NCOs addressed the team about their concerns.

Our next stop was Camp Casey where the commander of the 1st Combat Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, COL Anthony Ierardi greeted us. His command sergeant major, CSM Joseph Zettlemoyer, escorted us. You only have to be in the same room with COL Ierardi and CSM Zettlemoyer for a very short time to fully understand why the soldiers of the 1st Brigade are so motivated. They are emulating these two leaders. After a very interesting talk, we went to the 2d Battalion, 72d Armor where Command Sergeant Major Clarence Keithley welcomed us. We had a very good visit with the NCOs of this battalion and they were also afforded the opportunity to express their concerns to the team.

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I am very interested in receiving concerns, comments, and suggestions from soldiers out in the field. Please send all questions and comments to the following email address:

CSM@knox.army.mil

Two or three questions will be selected and featured in each edition of *ARMOR*.

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It's interesting to note that some of the NCOs feel much like the young PFC and are concerned that soldiers are not coming to Korea because of the bad, and sometimes not so truthful, information that they receive from other soldiers.

The next morning we went to Rodriguez Range, a state-of-the-art multipurpose tank range, and were greeted by the 1st Battalion (1st Tank as they say), 72d Armor commander, LTC Christopher Queen, and his command sergeant major, CSM James Williams. We sat in the tower (a platoon was going through Tank Table XI) while LTC Queen and CSM Williams shared with me the in-depth process that they go through to ensure tank crews are combat ready. During my 27-year career, I have never seen anything like it. It was a true art of personnel management to ensure that the tank commander and gunner combination was correct. I was once again thoroughly excited at how much energy these two leaders put into ensuring that

every soldier is given the opportunity to be successful.

We also visited the dining facility, to eat lunch with some young soldiers and talk to them about their tour in Korea. I spoke with a few soldiers who were excited about going home after 12 months. Some of the Korean soldiers, who are required to serve 26 months, were just as excited about finishing their tours. They also call it "going home." Not one of the U.S. soldiers said that they disliked Korea, but felt that a year is a long time to be away from home. I assured them that all soldiers have the same feelings about being separated from their loved ones. Before we departed, we met with the NCOs of this fine unit and gave them the chance to vent.

We all need to be proud of these men and women who are defending freedom daily. I have never seen a more focused group of soldiers and only wish that I could be a part of this great mission.

Finally, I would like to personally thank COL Ierardi and CSM Zettlemoyer for allowing us to talk to their soldiers. The 1st Brigade leaders are an example of how direct and personal involvement with your soldiers can and does make a difference. It is very refreshing to see such leaders.

Again, I would like to say that I feel extremely fortunate to be your Armor Center Command Sergeant Major. I look forward to hearing from you. Your comments and concerns surrounding the Armor community are very important. We are continuing to look for ways to improve our armor force and want to assure you that the welfare of our soldiers will always be our main priority. Although technology is very important, our soldiers continue to be the main factor for success.

Always seek self-improvement, keep your head up, even pump out your chest a little and remember, "PRIDE IS CONTAGIOUS!!"